

Trying Not to Over-think Things
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Psalm 19
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No doubt you have heard someone say, maybe a friend or a loved one, that they feel the presence of God most keenly while surrounded by the beauty and splendor of a breathtaking landscape, or the starry firmament, or when the pound of the surf resonates in their chest. In fact, they might even say they know God through their encounters with the natural world. Maybe you are one of them.

No wonder, this world, this amazing state we live in is filled with awe inspiring, soul stirring spectacles of nature. You can't help but feel closer to the creator while under the spell of such wonder.

I can relate. Let me offer an observation: To drink in the grandeur and feel the presence of the Almighty, all that is needed is to be present, to just let your mind go blank to take it all in.

It is very much an experience of the heart, the head is merely along for a ride! Or at least it is for most people. One of my favorite moments with a beloved parishioner happened about ten years ago. Paul was lovely, gentle, caring man, a Nuclear Engineer by trade, with an IQ of around 300. He and his wife Judy were part of a weekly Bible Study and on this particular day they arrived late to class. Paul came into the room all aglow, as was his custom, extolling the virtues of an especially beautiful fall day in New England. After exclaiming how gorgeous he felt the day had been, he added a short caveat to his pronouncement. Something like, "It was a beautiful day, but the day was disturbed a bit by some upper level disturbances that were created by the vortex effect of uneven heating of the atmosphere by the sun, the irregularities of the earth's surface, and rotation of the earth." We all nodded without the benefit of comprehension. Noting our confusion, his wife Judy leaned forward with a knowing smile and added, "It was windy!"

Sometimes you can overthink something.

Here's my trouble. When I am in the presence of a particularly beautiful or impressive scene, I inevitably become distracted, preoccupied with the question of how can I best capture what I am seeing. Many of you know this about me, I love taking pictures. It's my passion. I especially love photographing beautiful landscapes and the people I love. To do it well takes real thought and planning. That is the reality of good photography. Well, last week, I learned an important lesson...

It came on our trip to Boston, when Lisa and I took our daughter Laura back to college, so we might also visit our son, James. It was a terrific trip.

During our last night together, we decided to visit Windaersheek Beach, a gem on the NorthShore of Boston. It is a U shaped shoreline surrounded by granite boulders on one side and the quaint New England sea town of Rockport on the other. By the time we arrived, it was already dusk. We could barely see the water; the water being at least a quarter mile away from the beach. Never have I seen the tide so far out. As we got out of the car, I decided to leave my cell phone behind. Reception would be lousy I thought so why bother bringing it. It would be a fateful decision.

After our long walk on the wet and rippled sand of the beach, we finally arrived at the water's edge. It was slowly creeping back toward shore at a steady pace. I was somewhat mesmerized by the movement of the

water inching its way back toward land, and then, I witnessed one of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen in my life.

To be honest, my first reaction was one of deep regret. Why didn't I bring camera or at the very least my iPhone to capture what I was seeing? What was I thinking? Dispelling the notion that running all the way back to the car wasn't reasonable, I decided to put aside my frustration and looked with new eyes at what was unfolding before me.

To be present and to let the beautiful scene wash over me to see what might emerge.

Words fail me now because to my left, along the shore, the western horizon was filled with the effervescent colors of the final moments of dusk. Distant thunderheads were high enough to still reflect the sun, that was long set. The thunderheads were aglow with beautiful shades of pink, orange, red and blue. Their radiance reflected in the gentle movement of the ocean making its way back to shore.

It was absolutely spellbinding, but what touched my heart most deeply were the silhouettes of Lisa and Laura walking together toward the now fading light, each leaning into the loving embrace of the other. Mother and daughter as one, their figures merged into one beautiful expression of love.

It was so powerful I couldn't fully comprehend what I was seeing or feeling. I felt the very presence of God in that moment. I was so glad I left my camera back in the car.

*There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.*

This is what I learned that evening, if I had a camera I could have captured that scene, and hung it on the wall of my office to admire. I could have if spent my time that glorious evening trying to find the perfect angle or pick the right exposure or decide on the correct shutter speed. I could have, but I am so grateful I didn't. Because, if I did, I would have been in my head and miss experiencing the wonder of it all.

Just being still and present made all the difference. The wave of emotions that washed over me that evening while my dear ones walked toward the light will forever reside right here.

Yes, sometimes it is important to just be present, to open your hearts and minds to something deep and meaningful and truly divine and to try not overthink it. And, to remember the heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork. I find this to be a powerful metaphor for life and faith.

For it is true that a rich faith journey is a growing experience. Filled with times of contemplation and study to deepen our knowledge of understanding. It is a journey enriched by acts of generosity and grace that bring our beliefs to life. Times of putting one's faith into action are essential and greatly needed in this world. These are both important elements of the Christian Walk. But, we must also learn how to just be present to the stirrings of God's Spirit in our lives even in the most common of moments.

When Jesus was saying farewell to his friends on the night that he was betrayed, he said to them a simple yet profound command. Whenever you break bread together; take a moment, open your eyes and make ready your hearts, because whenever you eat or drink, my love will be with you. Whenever you break bread;

not just once a month, in worship, with impossibly small cups, and little cubes of bread, or the gluten free option if you are so inclined, always be open, always be ready, always be aware.

So, as we gather now by the table where Christ is host... put aside, as best you can, those many things that distract, and open your hearts to the incredible wonders that surround us. Take comfort in the knowledge that you are in a place of respite and renewal in company with brothers and sisters who are reflections of God's love. Come to the table, breathing deeply into God's Spirit allowing the miracle of life to take hold of you and see what might unfold in its blessing.

Psalm 19

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.

² Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.

³ There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;

⁴ yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hidden from its heat.